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STATE BOARD

OF

LIBRARY COMMISSIONERS

HOW TO START

A

FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY

PREPARED BY

MARY C. SPENCER, SECRETARY

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HOW TO START A FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY.

Since the establishment of the State Board of Library Commissioners numerous inquiries have been received by the Secretary relative to the establishment of a free public library in a city or village. To fully cover these inquiries the Board authorized the printing of a circular, which may be properly entitled

HOW TO START A FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY.

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We will suppose that a city in Michigan has a population of 1,000 or more, but no public library. The first move must necessarily be to awaken in the people of this city a library spirit, an appreciation of the educational necessity of a library and to a desire for its establishment as a part of the municipal government. The influence of the local papers should be secured, the clergymen and teachers should take hold of the matter, the representative men and women of the city should by word and pen arouse public sentiment in behalf of the movement. The appeal should be made to all classes of society—taking it for granted that all are interested in the betterment of the city which is their home. Petitions should be circulated and signed if possible by every taxpayer, the children and young people should unite in such a petition. The moral effect of such a force would be tremendous, and could not be ignored by the city officers.

The petition should be addressed to the city council and should state the libraryless condition of the city and ask that immediate action be taken to establish a free public library. A strong committee should be appointed to present the matter at the meeting of the city council with the request that the body acting under Section 1, Act 164, Public Acts 1877, establish a public library (and reading room) and levy the tax necessary to support the same.

Act 164, Section 1. THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF MICHIGAN ENACT: That the city council of each incorporated city shall have

D.A.

power to establish and maintain a public library and reading room, for the use and benefit of the inhabitants of such city, and may make a levy not to exceed one mill on the dollar annually on all taxable property in the city, such taxes to be levied and collected in like manner with other general taxes of said city, and to be known as the "Library fund."

The ordinance having been passed and signed by the mayor the next step will be the appointment of a library board under Sections 2-5 of the same as follows :

Sec. 2. When a city council shall have decided to establish and maintain a public library and reading room under this act, the mayor of such city shall, with the approval of the city council, proceed to appoint a board of nine directors for the same, chosen from the citizens at large, with reference to their fitness for such office, and not more than one member of the city council shall be at any time a member of said board.

Sec. 3. Said directors shall hold office, one-third for one year, one-third for two years and one-third for three years, from the date of their appointment, and at their first regular meeting shall cast lots for the respective terms, and annually thereafter the mayor shall appoint, as before, three directors, to take the place of the retiring directors, who shall hold office for three years and until their successors are appointed. The mayor may, by and with the consent of the city council, remove any director for misconduct or neglect of duty.

Sec. 4. Vacancies in the board of directors occasioned by removals, resignation or otherwise shall be reported to the city council, and be filled in like manner as such original appointments, and no director shall receive compensation as such.

Sec. 5. Said directors shall, immediately after appointment, meet and organize by the election of one of their number as president, and by the election of such other officers as they may deem necessary. They shall make and adopt such by-laws, rules and regulations for their own guidance and for the government of the library and reading room as may be expedient, not inconsistent with this act. They shall have exclusive control of the expenditure of all moneys so collected to the credit of the library fund, and of the construction of any library building, and of the supervision, care and custody of the grounds, rooms or buildings constructed, leased or set apart for the purpose: Provided, That all moneys received for such library shall be deposited in the treasury of said city to the credit of the library fund, and shall be kept separate and apart from other moneys of such city, and drawn upon by the proper officers of said city, upon the properly authenticated vouchers of the library board. Said board shall have power to purchase or lease grounds, to occupy, lease or erect an appropriate building or buildings for the use of said library; shall have power to appoint a suitable librarian and necessary assistants, and fix their compensation; and shall also have power to remove such appointees; and shall, in general, carry out the spirit and intent of this act in establishing and maintaining a public library and reading room.

The powers of the Board of Directors as given in Section 5 are large and the body should be selected with the greatest care. It

should consist of the representative business men and women, the superintendent of the city schools and two or three who are familiar with books and judges of the intellectual needs of the city.

Under Section 1 "a tax not to exceed one mill on the dollar may be levied." An assessed valuation of \$200,000 would give a fund of \$200 a year for library purposes, not a large sum, but enough for a start if properly managed.

The public library having been established and the Board of Directors appointed, the next step will be to find a home for the books and a suitable custodian. In almost every town there may be found some public spirited citizen, who will provide a room for a time at least, free of charge. Inexpensive shelving can be built and the room made comfortable with but little outlay. Then comes the selection of a librarian and this is the most important matter to be arranged. With so little money the employment of a trained librarian is out of the question, but it is absolutely necessary that for a short time, at least, the services be secured of a person who has had library experience. The proper arrangement and classification of the books is of vital importance and can only be satisfactorily done by a person who has had experience in that work. A month of experienced labor is worth six months of untrained effort. While this work is going on select your permanent librarian and let it be, if possible, some one who will do the work for the love of it, and has at least a touch of the three graces, faith, hope and love, with the patience that these words imply.

If the employment of a trained librarian is absolutely impossible then send your librarian to the Michigan State Library where for a limited time instruction will be given gratuitously in the elementary details of library work. In selecting the books ask the advice of experienced librarians, help on this point will also be given at the State Library. In the selection of books one point must be always remembered, buy the books that will do the greatest good to the greatest number. A free public library is FOR ALL PEOPLE, not for specialists or scholars alone.

Let us assume that the library is an established fact, that the room has been secured, a librarian chosen and books purchased and shelved. We find, however, that after the full amount of money allowed by law has been spent more is needed to maintain the library and make it an institution of which the community may be proud. In this case the best plan is to make a personal canvass of the town, soliciting financial aid—make a strong plea in behalf of the library and emphasize the good which will result

from its success. Entertainments of different kinds, socials, concerts, etc., can be given and often the interest of men of means will result in gifts of money. There are in every community persons interested in establishing a public library, who while they cannot give money will find on their shelves books which they have read with pleasure and instruction and which are worthy to be found on the shelves of any public library—books of standard authors, of fiction and travel—which will not be read again by any member of the family, but which will help form the nucleus of a library of two hundred volumes. If possible a reading room should be connected with the library. Donations of newspapers and magazines would supply the material, residents should be invited to send their magazines regularly to the reading room and the editor of the local paper would no doubt contribute his exchanges for the purpose. In short, if the men and women of the town will unite in earnest effort the means of growth will surely come.

There are in many of the towns and villages of the State libraries under the control of different organizations, library associations, libraries owned by women's clubs, Ladies' library associations and others of the same class. These libraries are supported by membership fees, fines, etc., and are necessarily limited in their circulation and consequently in their influence. In a majority of cases an arrangement can be made by which these libraries may become part of a free public library. A meeting of a committee of citizens appointed by the mayor with the officers or Board of the association library should be held and the matter discussed in an impartial and generous manner. Representatives of the Association library should be appointed on the Board of Directors of the public free library. In all arrangements of this kind there should be only one object in view, namely, the advancement of the educational welfare of the city.

Up to this point we have been dealing with cities—the law applying to villages and townships is as follows:

Public Acts 1877, Act 164.

Sec. 10. When fifty voters of any incorporated village or township shall present a petition to the clerk of the village, or township, asking that a tax may be levied for the establishment of a free public library in such village or township, and shall specify in their petition the rate of taxation, not to exceed one mill on the dollar, such clerk shall, in the next legal notice of the regular annual election in such village or township, give notice that at such election every voter may vote "for a mill tax for a free public library," or "against a mill tax for a free public library," specifying in such notice the rate of taxation mentioned in such petition; and if the majority of all the votes cast in such village

or township shall be for the tax of a free public library, the tax specified in such notice shall be levied and collected in like manner with other general taxes of said village or township, and shall be known as the "library fund;" and when such free library shall have been established, and a Board of Directors elected and qualified, as hereinafter provided, it shall be the duty of such Board of Directors, on or before the first Monday of September in each year, to prepare an estimate of the amount of money necessary for the support and maintenance of such library for the ensuing year, not exceeding one mill on the dollar of the taxable property of the village or township, and report such estimate to the assessor of such village or the supervisors of such township for assessment and collection, the same as other village or township taxes, and the same shall be assessed and collected; and the corporate authorities of any such village or township may exercise the same powers conferred upon the corporate authorities of cities under this act.

We will suppose that a small village or township wishes to establish a free public library—The first act under the law would be to circulate a petition asking that a tax for this purpose be levied and that the village or township clerk give notice that at the next annual election voters may vote for or against a mill tax for a free public library. Before the election the matter should be thoroughly agitated publicly and privately. The value of a library to the community and its importance as a factor in the education of the young should be discussed. The establishment of a free public library in a village or town is an object lesson for the neighboring localities, and speaks volumes for the intelligence of the people.

A favorable vote having been given, the next step is described by Section 11 of the act, namely, the election of directors.

Sec. 11. At the next regular election after any village or township shall have voted to establish a free public library, there shall be elected a library board of six directors, one-third for one year, one-third for two years and one-third for three years; and annually thereafter there shall be elected two directors, who shall hold their office for three years, and until their successors are elected and qualified, which board shall have the same powers as are by this act conferred upon the Board of Directors of free public libraries in cities.

Sec. 12. This act shall not apply to cities or villages containing a population of over ten thousand or to any city or village maintaining a public library under any special act.

A very reasonable objection to the provisions of the law is that so long a time must elapse between the expressed wish of the voters for a library and its establishment. It would seem feasible for the President of the village, or the Supervisors and Town Board of a town to appoint a temporary board, who should serve until the regular directors could be elected.

In conclusion the Board wishes to urge upon the people of the

State the great benefit which will result to their community by the establishment of a free public library in its midst, a common fountain of knowledge from which all may drink. An influence reaching beyond and above the schools and the only means whereby toiling masses can receive a liberal education.

The Board also wishes to emphasize the advantages which will accrue to free public libraries organizing under the Act of 1877.

Free public libraries, township and public school libraries in the State of Michigan may become registered with the State Board of Library Commissioners by complying with the following rules, formulated by the Board.

- (1) All registered libraries must be free to the public.
- (2) The libraries must have a suitable custodian and be placed in a room properly provided with book shelves and tables. It must be open to the public at least part of two days in the week.
- (3) A township library applying for registration must agree to use the fines as provided in Article 13, Section 12, Constitution of Michigan, exclusively for library purposes.

The above named section reads as follows:

SEC. 12. The Legislature shall also provide for the establishment of at least one public library in each township and city, and all fines assessed and collected in the several counties and townships for any breach of the penal laws shall be exclusively applied to the use of such libraries; unless otherwise ordered by the township board of any township or the board of education of any city: Provided, That in no case shall such fines be used for other than library or school purposes.

- (4) A yearly report must be made to the State Board of Library Commissioners by the officers of the registered libraries. Blanks for the report will be furnished by the Board.

The rules having been accepted, a certificate of registration will be issued by the board to the applying library, which, by the transaction, will receive the following ADVANTAGES:

- (1) Registered libraries shall be entitled to receive from the Board of Library Commissioners advice and aid regarding the purchase, classifying and cataloguing of books, and information on all subjects relating to the care and management of libraries. Instruction in library work will also be given in the Michigan State Library to the librarians of registered libraries.

- (2) Catalogues of the Michigan State Library will be placed in all registered libraries, and a book or books may be borrowed from the State Library for a limited time by patrons of the registered library. These loans will be made on request of the local librarian and transportation expenses must be paid by the borrower.

- (3) Registered libraries may procure copies of State documents upon request made to the secretary of the Board of Library Commissioners.

- (4) Free public libraries incorporated under Act 164 of the Public Acts of 1877, and organized after the establishment of the Board of Library Commissioners, upon notification to the Board that they have

an established library of at least one hundred volumes, other than State or government documents, and upon furnishing a list of said books to the Board, may receive from the State a loan of one hundred volumes, to be selected from the lists furnished by the Board. Said books to be returned within six months, unless an extension of time is granted by the Board.

